

Kate Brown

Katherine Brown (born June 21, 1960) is an American politician and attorney serving as the 38th governor of Oregon since 2015. A member of the Democratic Party, she served three terms as the state representative from the 13th district of the Oregon House of Representatives from 1991 to 1997, three terms as the state senator from the 21st district of the Oregon Senate from 1997 to 2009, three terms as Majority Leader of the Oregon Senate from 2003 to 2009, as well as two terms as Oregon Secretary of State from 2009 to 2015. She assumed the governorship upon the resignation of John Kitzhaber in 2015.^[1] She was elected to serve out the remainder of his gubernatorial term in the special election in 2016 and was reelected to a full term in 2018.

As an openly bisexual woman, Brown has made history several times through her electoral success. In 2008, she became the first openly LGBT person elected secretary of state of a state in the United States. In 2016, she became the first openly LGBT person elected governor of a state in the United States as well as the second woman elected governor of Oregon (after Barbara Roberts).^{[2][3]}

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Kate Brown



38th Governor of Oregon

Incumbent

Assumed office

February 18, 2015

Preceded by [John Kitzhaber](#)

24th Oregon Secretary of State

In office

January 5, 2009 – February 18, 2015

Governor [Ted Kulongoski](#)
[John Kitzhaber](#)

Preceded by [Bill Bradbury](#)

Succeeded by [Jeanne Atkins](#)

Member of the Oregon Senate from the 21st district

In office

January 13, 1997 – January 2, 2009

Preceded by [Shirley Gold](#)

Succeeded by [Diane Rosenbaum](#)

Member of the Oregon House of Representatives from the 13th district

In office

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Early life and education

Brown was born in Torrejón de Ardoz, Spanish State (present-day Torrejón de Ardoz, Community of Madrid, Spain), where her father was serving in the United States Air Force, and grew up in Minnesota. She graduated from Mounds View High School in Arden Hills, Minnesota in 1978.^[4] She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Conservation with a certificate in women's studies from the University of Colorado Boulder in 1981 and a J.D. degree and certificate in environmental law from the Lewis & Clark College Law School in 1985.^[5]

Career

Oregon Legislative Assembly



Brown in 2008

Brown was appointed to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1991, filling a vacancy in a Portland seat left by predecessor Judy Bauman, who took an executive appointment.^[6] She was elected to a second term before being elected to the Oregon State Senate in 1996. Two years later, she was elected Senate Democratic Leader. In 2003, she was elected Majority Leader of the Oregon Senate.

Brown was a top fundraiser for her caucus, helping the Democrats tie the Republicans in the Oregon Senate in 2003. That same year she also won the position of caucus leader. Brown helped round up votes to pass a bill that year reforming Oregon's Public Employee Retirement System and then voted against the reform bill in order to preserve her ties to organized labor.

Many of her colleagues went on to lose their seats due to backlash from labor unions.^[7]

In July 2007, Brown announced that she would give up her seat in the Oregon Senate to be a candidate for Oregon Secretary of State the next year.^[8] On May 20, 2008, Brown won the election for the Democratic nomination for Secretary of State, and on November 5 she won the general election by a 51–46% margin against Republican candidate Rick Dancer.^[9]

Oregon Secretary of State

November 26, 1991 – January 12, 1997

Preceded by Judy Bauman

Succeeded by Dan Gardner

Personal details

Born Katherine Brown
June 21, 1960
Torrejón de Ardoz,
Spanish State
(present-day Torrejón de Ardoz, Community of Madrid, Spain)

Political party Democratic

Spouse(s) Dan Little

Children 2 stepchildren

Residence Mahonia Hall

Alma mater University of Colorado Boulder
(BA)
Lewis & Clark College (JD)

Website Government website (<http://oregon.gov/gov/Pages/index.aspx>)

Coming into office, one of Brown's priorities was to perform rigorous performance audits to help balance the budget. In 2008, for every dollar the State spent, performance audits returned \$8 in cost savings. In 2010 Brown reported she delivered \$64 in cost savings and efficiencies for every dollar invested in the Division.^[10]

In 2009 Brown introduced and passed House Bill 2005 to crack down on fraud and abuse in the initiative and referendum system. It gave the Secretary of State more power to prosecute fraud and enforce the constitutional ban on paying per signature on initiatives.^[11]

Brown also implemented online voter registration. As of March 2010, a year after its introduction, Oregon Public Broadcasting noted nearly 87,000 Oregonians had already registered online to vote.^[12]

In 2009 the Aspen Institute named Brown as one of 24 "Rising Stars" in American politics and awarded her a Rodel Fellowship. The program is a two-year fellowship designed to break down partisan barriers and explore the responsibilities of public leadership and good governance.^[13]

In October 2012 *StateTech* magazine highlighted Brown's use of iPad and tablet technology to increase accessibility for voters with disabilities. In 2011 Oregon became the first jurisdiction in the country to use this technology to help voters with disabilities mark their ballots.^[14]

In January 2015 Brown submitted a letter to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in support of the purchase of Time Warner Cable by Comcast that had been almost entirely ghostwritten by Comcast, a company that has made a total of over \$10,000 in donations to her past election campaigns.^[15]



Brown accepting an award from the Oregon National Guard, June 2014

Governor of Oregon

On February 18, 2015, Governor John Kitzhaber resigned amid a public corruption scandal; Brown succeeded him since the Constitution of Oregon identifies the secretary of state as the successor when the governor leaves office prematurely.^[1]

Brown named Brian Shipley, a lobbyist for Oregon Health & Science University and former deputy chief of staff to Governor Ted Kulongoski, as her chief of staff.^{[16][17]} She appointed Jeanne Atkins secretary of state.^[18]

Upon taking office, Brown extended the moratorium on executions Kitzhaber had enacted.^[19] In 2015, she also signed a "motor voter" bill she had championed while secretary of state, to automatically register voters using their driver's license data.^{[20][21]} At Politico's "State Solutions" voter engagement conference, Brown said, "Registration is a barrier to people participating in this process" and "Voting is a fundamental right of being a citizen, and people across the country should have the ability to access this fundamental right without barriers like registration". Addressing critics of policies aimed at increasing voter turnout, such as Oregon's "motor voter" law, she said, "I think the good news is, in Oregon, we actually want people to vote in our state."^[22]

In July 2016 Brown signed HB3402, which raised the maximum speed limit to 70 MPH on I-82 and sections of I-84 and US-95. Previously the maximum allowed speed limit allowed on Oregon highways was 65. This bill also raised speed limits on non-interstate highways in eastern Oregon from 55 to 65.^[23]

Oregon law required a special election in November 2016 for the two years remaining in Kitzhaber's unfinished term as governor. By April 2016 Brown had raised over \$800,000 for her campaign in 2016 alone, while her closest Democratic primary competitor, Julian Bell, had raised \$33,000. She defeated Bell, Chet Chance, Kevin M. Forsythe, Steve Johnson, and Dave Stauffer for the Democratic nomination.^{[24][25]} She won the general election against Republican Party nominee Bud Pierce, Independent Party nominee Cliff Thomason, Libertarian Party nominee James Foster, and Constitution Party nominee Aaron Donald Auer, receiving 51% of the vote.

In January 2017 Brown named Nik Blosser^[26] her third chief of staff after the resignation of former chief of staff Kristen Leonard.^{[27][28]} In June 2017 Brown signed into law the Oregon Equal Pay Act, which banned employers from using job seekers' prior salaries in hiring decisions.^[29]

Brown was reelected in November 2018, defeating Republican Knute Buehler 50.0% to 43.9%, with Independent Party nominee Patrick Starnes, Libertarian Party nominee Nick Chen, Constitution Party nominee Aaron Auer, and Progressive Party nominee Chris Henry taking the remaining votes.

In a November 2018 budget plan Brown proposed a 30-year plan to limit Oregon's greenhouse gas emissions via a "cap-and-trade" system.^[30] In 2019, after a measles outbreak in Oregon, she urged parents to vaccinate their kids. "Holy smokes, this is basic science," she said.^[31]

On June 20, 2019, Brown authorized state troopers to search for and return 11 Republican State Senators after the Oregon Senate ordered the Sergeant-at-Arms to compel the senators to attend a Senate session. The senators had left to prevent a quorum in the Senate and thereby block the passage of a sweeping climate-change bill.^{[32][33]}

In response to the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, Brown has publicly urged Oregonians to stay home to avoid spreading the virus, but was initially criticized for not issuing a shelter-in-place order.^[34] The order was officially issued on March 23, 2020.^[35]

Criticism

As Secretary of State, Brown faced further political backlash when she said she had made a mistake in the scheduling of the election for Labor Commissioner between Democrat Brad Avakian and Republican Bruce Starr. An early election would have favored Starr, but as the election approached, Brown changed her mind and scheduled the election for November, helping Avakian win the race.^[7]

Brown has been criticized for ousting a number of high-level public officials.^[36] She has also been accused of mismanaging Oregon DHS Child Welfare in audits published in January 2018.^{[37][38][39][40][41][42][43]}

In July of 2018, Brown brokered meetings between several large Oregon-based companies, including Nike, and union leaders over campaigns to include Initiative Petition 25, a corporate transparency initiative, and Measure 104, geared towards limiting reductions in corporate tax breaks, on the November ballot. Brown's office said her goal was to prevent both initiatives from coming to fruition. She later faced complaints over the alleged brokering of an agreement—supposedly in exchange for financial support through a Nike PAC—in order to keep Petition 25 off the ballot. That year, Nike founder Phil Knight contributed over \$1 million to Brown's Republican opponent's campaign, although

the company itself gave financial support to Brown.^[44] Only a week after the submission of an official complaint, Oregon's Department of Justice found no grounds for an investigation, with the Department's Criminal Justice Division chief council writing, "there is no information that the proponents of [Initiative Petition 25] sought to qualify the petition for the ballot for an improper purpose." Brown and supporters later characterized the complaint as a political ploy.^[45] Initiative Petition 25's sponsors ultimately withheld it from the November ballot. Despite having obtained the requisite number of signatures before the submission deadline, union leaders cited an "internal decision," rather than Nike's or Brown's influence, in choosing not to move forward with the process. With the aforementioned Measure 104 and several other anti-tax and anti-labor bills having already secured spaces on the ballot, AFSCME political director Joe Baessler framed the issue as a "question of resources."^[46]

Brown's process in appointing Misha Isaak, formerly her general attorney, to the Oregon Court of Appeals in August 2019 caused concern among members of the State Bar Association.^[47] After the Public Records Advocate resigned and released correspondence damaging to Isaak, more people called on Brown to revoke the appointment, including former Oregon Supreme Court Justice Edwin Peterson.^{[48][49]}

2019 recall attempt

In 2019, the Oregon Republican Party and an independent group, "Flush Down Kate Brown", attempted to remove Brown by recall petition, but fell 40,790 signatures short of the required 280,050.^[50]

2020 recall attempt

In 2020, Bill Currier, chairman of the Oregon Republican Party and mayor of Adair Village, launched another recall petition. It cited many of the concerns in the 2019 petition in addition to others, mostly focused on her handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in Oregon.^{[51][52]} Wilsonville activist Kelsey Massey started another petition.^[53] Both are in circulation. One must collect at least 280,050 signatures to trigger a verification process, the first step toward a recall election.

Personal life

Brown lives in West Linn, Oregon, rather than Mahonia Hall as most Oregon governors have. She lives with her husband, Dan Little and two stepchildren, Dylan and Jessie. She is the country's first openly bisexual statewide office holder and first openly bisexual governor.^{[9][54][55][56]}

Electoral history

Oregon State Senate

2004

Oregon's State Senate 21st District Democratic Primary Election, 2004				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Kate Brown (Incumbent)	13,541	98.81%
		<i>write-ins</i>	163	1.19%
Total votes			13,704	100%

Oregon's State Senate 21st District Election, 2004				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Kate Brown (Incumbent)	52,278	86.52%
	<u>Libertarian</u>	Theresa Reed	4,563	7.55%
	<u>Constitution</u>	Paul deParrie	3,126	5.17%
		<i>write-ins</i>	455	0.75%
Total votes			60,422	100%

Oregon Secretary of State

2008

Oregon Secretary of State Democratic Primary Election, 2008				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Kate Brown	277,853	51.74%
	<u>Democratic</u>	Rick Metsger	145,820	27.15%
	<u>Democratic</u>	Vicki Walker	96,835	18.03%
	<u>Democratic</u>	Paul Damian Wells	14,696	2.74%
		<i>write-ins</i>	1,842	0.34%
Total votes			537,046	100%

Oregon Secretary of State Election, 2008				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Kate Brown	873,968	51.00%
	<u>Republican</u>	Rick Dancer	785,740	45.85%
	<u>Pacific Green</u>	Seth Alan Woolley	51,271	2.99%
		<i>write-ins</i>	2,740	0.16%
Total votes			1,713,719	100%

2012

Oregon Secretary of State Democratic Primary Election, 2012			
Party	Candidate	Votes	%
<u>Democratic</u>	Kate Brown (Incumbent)	284,470	91.13%
<u>Democratic</u>	Paul Damian Wells	26,177	8.39%
	<i>write-ins</i>	1,510	0.48%
Total votes		312,157	100%

Oregon Secretary of State Election, 2012			
Party	Candidate	Votes	%
<u>Democratic</u>	Kate Brown (Incumbent)	863,656	51.28%
<u>Republican</u>	Knute Buehler	727,607	43.20%
<u>Pacific Green</u>	Seth Woolley	44,235	2.63%
<u>Libertarian</u>	Bruce Alexander Knight	24,273	1.44%
<u>Progressive</u>	Robert Wolfe	21,783	1.29%
	<i>write-ins</i>	2,561	0.15%
Total votes		1,684,115	100%

Governor of Oregon**2016**

Oregon Gubernatorial Special Democratic Primary Election, 2016			
Party	Candidate	Votes	%
<u>Democratic</u>	Kate Brown (Incumbent)	494,890	83.06%
<u>Democratic</u>	Julian Bell	49,113	8.24%
<u>Democratic</u>	Dave Stauffer	16,108	2.70%
<u>Democratic</u>	Steve Johnson	13,363	2.24%
<u>Democratic</u>	Kevin Forsythe	10,147	1.70%
<u>Democratic</u>	Chet Chance	5,636	0.95%
	<i>write-ins</i>	6,595	1.11%
Total votes		595,852	100%

Oregon Gubernatorial Special Election, 2016 ^[57]				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Kate Brown (Incumbent)	985,027	50.62%
	<u>Republican</u>	Bud Pierce	845,609	43.45%
	<u>Independent</u>	Cliff Thomason	47,481	2.44%
	<u>Libertarian</u>	James Foster	45,191	2.32%
	<u>Constitution</u>	Aaron Donald Auer	19,400	1.00%
		<i>write-ins</i>	3,338	0.17%
Total votes			1,946,046	100%

2018

Oregon Gubernatorial Democratic Primary Election, 2018				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Kate Brown (Incumbent)	324,541	81.9%
	<u>Democratic</u>	Ed Jones	33,464	8.4%
	<u>Democratic</u>	Candace Neville	29,110	7.4%
		<i>write-ins</i>	8,912	2.3%
Total votes			396,027	100%

Oregon Gubernatorial Election, 2018				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Kate Brown (Incumbent)	885,232	50.0%
	<u>Republican</u>	Knute Buehler	776,558	43.9%
	<u>Independent</u>	Patrick Starnes	50,879	2.9%
	<u>Libertarian</u>	Nick Chen	26,587	1.5%
	<u>Constitution</u>	Aaron Auer	19,645	1.1%
	<u>Progressive</u>	Chris Henry	10,252	0.6%
Total votes			1,769,153	100.0%

Awards and distinctions

- 1995 – Recipient, Woman of Achievement Award from the Oregon Commission for Women^[58]
- 2004 – Recipient, National Public and Community Service Award from the American Mental Health Counselors Association^[59]
- 2007 – Recipient, President's Award of Merit from the Oregon State Bar^[58]

- 2015 – Was listed as one of the nine runners-up for *The Advocate's* Person of the Year^[60]
- 2017 – Named to the inaugural *NBC Out #Pride30* list^[61]
- Profiles in Courage by Basic Rights Oregon^[58]

See also

- List of U.S. state governors born outside the United States
- List of female governors in the United States
- List of female secretaries of state in the United States
- List of openly LGBT heads of government
- List of the first LGBT holders of political offices in the United States

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Further reading

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External links

- Governor of Oregon (<https://www.oregon.gov/gov/>) official government site
- Kate Brown for Governor (<https://katebrownfororegon.com/>) official campaign site
- Kate Brown (https://curlie.org/Regional/North_America/United_States/Oregon/Government/Executive/Governor_Kate_Brown) at Curlie
- Appearances (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?katebrown>) on C-SPAN
-
- Profile (<https://www.votesmart.org/candidate/2990>) at Vote Smart

Party political offices		
Preceded by Bill Bradbury	Democratic nominee for Oregon Secretary of State 2008, 2012	Succeeded by Brad Avakian
Preceded by John Kitzhaber	Democratic nominee for Governor of Oregon 2016, 2018	Most recent
Political offices		
Preceded by Bill Bradbury	Oregon Secretary of State 2009–2015	Succeeded by Jeanne Atkins
Preceded by John Kitzhaber	Governor of Oregon 2015–present	Incumbent
U.S. order of precedence (ceremonial)		
Preceded by Mike Pence <i>as Vice President</i>	Order of Precedence of the United States Within Oregon	Succeeded by Mayor of city in which event is held
		Succeeded by Otherwise Nancy Pelosi <i>as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives</i>
Preceded by Tim Walz <i>as Governor of Minnesota</i>	Order of Precedence of the United States Outside Oregon	Succeeded by Laura Kelly <i>as Governor of Kansas</i>

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